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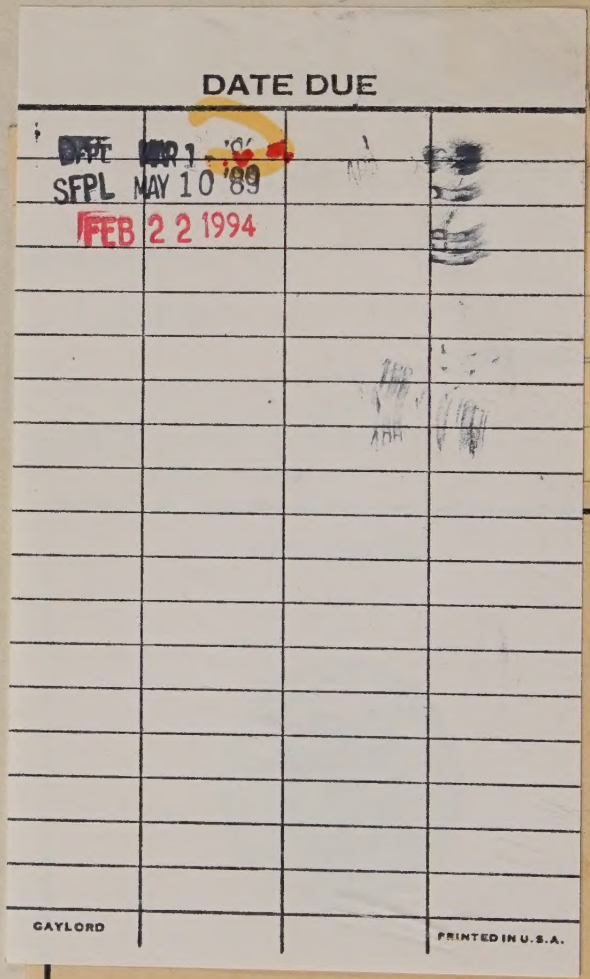

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SWINBURNE AS I KNEW HIM

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

IN GOOD COMPANY
GOD AND THE ANT
CAPTAIN SHANNON
ETC., ETC.

SWINBURNE
AS I KNEW HIM

WITH SOME UNPUBLISHED LETTERS FROM THE POET TO HIS COUSIN THE HON. LADY HENNIKER HEATON

By COULSON KERNAHAN

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TO

MAURICE BARING

DEAR M. B.,

It is to the poet of whom I here write that I owe, if indirectly, my friendship with you, whose Dramatic Poems I hold to be greater and more beautiful than those of any living poet. That he had read and admired work of yours, I have cause to know, and that he has no truer admirer than you, I am equally aware. May I then link his name with yours, in the dedication of this little volume?

C. K.

BY WAY OF PREFACE

THE WHY AND THE WHEREFORE OF THE CONTENTS OF THIS BOOK, TO WHICH IS ADDED A SWINBURNE "STORY"

SOON after I had finished the writing of this small volume, two friends, whom it is my wife's and my own happiness often to welcome to our home—Sir John and the Hon. Lady Henniker Heaton—were here; and as the latter is a cousin of Swinburne's, I told our visitors that I had written a second instalment of recollections. They had already seen my previous reminiscences of the great poet, and expressed themselves as interested to see these.

They were then so good as to say that I might have the use of the letters here for the first time printed. That I was grateful

so to be privileged, and remain grateful, I need hardly record, for one letter at least has singular charm and is very characteristic of the writer.

Half a dozen words from a great man are of infinitely more interest and importance than what a little man may, in very many words, say of him. That is why I adopt the unusual course of printing at the beginning of this book, instead of at the end, in an Appendix, the four letters in question.

When I penned my recollections of Swinburne (for *In Good Company*) I did so with some reserve. Very little, either of his early life or of his later days with that "hero of friendship" Watts-Dunton, was known to the outside world, and I did not feel free to set down all that was within my knowledge.

Now that Mr. Gosse's masterly and brilliant *Life* as well as *Swinburne's Letters* have been published, and the facts are widely known—have, indeed, been the occasion of

some controversy—the reserve of which I have spoken seems to me no longer necessary. On the contrary, a wise frankness strikes one as the better course. May I also say that though I have written frankly of Watts-Dunton, as well as of Swinburne, and have not sought to paint him as other than he was, and so not without human failings, my affection for him, and the honour in which I bear him, have only deepened with the passing of the years? In the whole history of literary friendships, there is no chapter more beautiful than Watts-Dunton's whole-hearted and great-hearted devotion to what he believed to be the best interests of his friends Swinburne and Rossetti.

I conclude with a new and true "story" concerning Swinburne.

Two elderly maiden ladies, with whom "birth" counted for everything, and "brains," even genius, scarcely at all, chanced to see the exquisitely beautiful miniatures which Lady Henniker Heaton (*née* the Hon.

Sermonda Burrell) was so kind as to allow to be reproduced in *The Letters of Swinburne*, which Dr. Arthur Compton-Rickett and the late Mr. Thomas Hake so ably edited.

"Who is this Mr. Swinburne, of whom we hear so much?" the elder lady asked. "We know, of course, that he is a poet, but who are his people?"

"Oh, he's the son of Admiral Charles Swinburne, who came of an old Northumberland family, and of Lady Jane Ashburnham, of Battle Place, Sussex," was the reply. "That," pointing to the miniature of Issabella Burrell, Countess of Beverley, and ancestress of the present Duke of Northumberland, "was his great-grandmother. Those," indicating the miniatures of Frances Julia Burrell, Duchess of Northumberland, and Elizabeth Burrell, Duchess of Hamilton and Marchioness of Exeter, "were his great-grand-aunts."

"Is that really so!" exclaimed the elder

lady, vastly impressed. "I had no idea he was so highly connected." Then, turning to her sister: "Do remind me, directly we get back, to order some of his books."

FROGNAL,
FAIRLIGHT,
NEAR HASTINGS.

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SWINBURNE AS I KNEW HIM

SWINBURNE AS I KNEW HIM

LETTERS FROM A. C. SWINBURNE TO HIS COUSIN, THE HON. LADY HENNIKER HEATON

THE PINES,
Sept. 9, 1903.

DEAR COUSIN SERMONDA,

It will give us both great pleasure to accept your invitation for the 18th.

I long to make acquaintance with Peregrine in the flesh. Persons of his age are invariably so good and kind to me, that I count with some confidence on his friendly patronage. With many thanks.

Your affectionate cousin,
A. C. SWINBURNE.

NOTE.—The "person" here mentioned is my young friend Peregrine, eldest son of Sir John and Lady Henniker Heaton, and heir to the baronetcy.

The Pines,
Putney Hill, S.W.
Sept. 10, 1903.

Dear Cousin Sermonda,

I am very sorry to say that Mr. Watts-Dunton, who was so much pleased at the idea of our visit, has just received some grave news from friends in the country, which will make it impossible for us to be with you on the 18th.

The week after next we go to the seaside, not far from Lancing. I cannot say what a bitter disappointment it is to me to have to postpone the pleasure of being presented to Peregrine. I was looking forward to it with longing and delight.

Your affectionate cousin,
A. C. Swinburne.

The Pines,
Dec. 7, 1904.

Dear Cousin Sermonda,

I am delighted to hear of the advent of an adorable person, whose feet I long to kiss, and greatly honoured by the proposal that I should stand sponsor to an angel from heaven.

Only, you see, as that is very truly my view of a new-born baby, it would be impossible for me to take any part, direct or

indirect, in a religious ceremony which represents it as "a child of wrath"—words which seem to me the most horrible of all blasphemies—standing in need of human intervention to transmute it into "a child of grace." I fear I must shock, but I trust I may not offend you by the avowal of an opinion which I have often enough, and plainly, put forward in public.

I am none the less gratified by your kindness in wishing to associate me in any way with a child of yours. If only the ceremony were secular, it would be to me the very greatest pleasure as well as honour to take any part in welcoming the arrival on earth of a baby, in whose eyes (I always think and maintain) we see all that we ever can see here of heaven.

I am fairly well, thanks, and rejoice to hear so good an account of Peregrine, whose kiss I beg to return with interest. Mrs. Watts-Dunton joins with me in all good wishes to both of you, and thanks for yours.

Your affectionate cousin,

A. C. SWINBURNE.

NOTE.—The "adorable person" here mentioned is another young friend of mine, Mary Araluen Henniker Heaton, only daughter of Sir John and Lady Henniker Heaton.

The Pines,
June 24, 1907.

My dear Cousin,

Thanks for three charming photographs. Peregrine on (or off) Midget must be a very sweet sight.

The little sister is most lovely.

But the charm of four weeks old is simply inexpressible.

I return your volume with my name written on the leaf. The Inscription to your friend, the Princess, must be supplied by yourself.

Ever sincerely yours,
A. C. Swinburne.

CHAPTER I

THE STORY OF A DEAR DECEIT

FACING me on my library wall as I pen these lines hangs a picture — Swinburne's treasured portrait of Victor Hugo. Writing to his sister on his own birthday, April 5, 1897, Swinburne says, in an unpublished letter: "Walter" (Watts-Dunton) "has given me as a birthday present a magnificent photograph (framed) of Victor Hugo, taken standing on a lonely cliff in Guernsey, and in a lovely high wind which must have made the snapshot a miracle of luck and skill. It is a superb likeness. One can almost see the living light in his wonderful eyes."

Oh, those poets! was my comment when I first saw this letter. For all the time, as

any reader of these lines would see at a glance, the picture, so far from being the "moment's monument" of a fortunate snapshot, is a carefully, even affectedly posed painting. Possibly the artist had in mind the famous picture of Napoleon at St. Helena, for Hugo stands on a narrow shelf of rock, jutting out into the sea. His arms are self-consciously, almost defiantly folded. His collar is carefully arranged around his bust in the correct and open-necked Byronic roll. His cape streams, bannerwise, behind him in the breeze, and even the clothing around his lower limbs is picturesquely draped in every fold. The poet, majestic of brow and magisterial of frown, has his eyes fixed and intent, as if in rhapsody, upon the vastness of old ocean, with which one is presumably intended to understand his great mind is communing.

It is a fine and striking picture, for the gift of which I was very grateful, and to me, at least, it has memories and associations

which make it more than precious. But none other than a poet—a poet, that is, of the type which only imagines, and rarely if ever reasons, as was the case with Swinburne—could have persuaded himself into believing that it was a snapshot from life. Yet these are the poets who most delight and fascinate us, for they see life with a child's freshness of eyes, and retain to the last not a little of the child-heart and of childhood's illusions.

This was the factor which Watts-Dunton had before him when he set out to effect an entire change in Swinburne's habits and life. The weaknesses, inherited or acquired, of genius are matters upon which, were it possible to do so, one would prefer to remain silent; but the fact that the "last infirmity of noble mind" of which Milton sings was, in Swinburne's case, though only in early life, alcoholic excess, has lately so repeatedly been stated in print, and indeed is so much a matter of common knowledge, that one need no longer hesitate to speak of it. That is

why I propose here to tell, I believe for the first time, the story of Watts-Dunton's dear deceit and loving and lovable guile, when he set himself the task of which I have spoken.

Naturally, I do not write as an eyewitness, for all this happened not far from forty years ago. I tell the story for what it is worth, as it was told to me by an old and intimate friend of Swinburne and of Watts-Dunton, who was frequently in their company at the time.

When Watts-Dunton took Swinburne in hand, the latter had been drinking brandy steadily and for some time, the result being—one need not go into medical details—that he was physically so prostrated as to be unable to leave his bed for three weeks. Watts-Dunton knew that he was dealing with one who, his genius and his great brains notwithstanding, was in some respects a child. He knew too that suddenly and entirely to cut off all alcohol would, in the case of one so accustomed to, and in a sense so depend-

ent upon it, be unwise, and might even endanger life. This then is how he went to work.

"Do you know, Algernon," he began, taking up the glass of brandy-and-water which stood by Swinburne's bedside and looking at it sourly, "this stuff isn't a drink in any real sense of the word. It is a drug, a medicine, to be taken only when prescribed by doctors—beastly stuff in my opinion at any time, and the very last drink in the world for a poet. Look at our great Tennyson. What does he drink? Port, that divinest nectar of the gods, the life-blood of the vine, distilled sunshine, as it were, caught and chaliced in the red heart of such grapes as grow nowhere out of old Spain, land of sunshine and song and lovely women.

"But brandy—bah! the very smell of it calls up sick-rooms, as well as wretched (and retching) Cockney travellers on a Channel steamer in a rough crossing. They tell me that old Tennyson never drinks less than a

bottle of port a day, and that its generous, life-giving qualities make another man of him, set his brain newly afire and singing, like great seas in a storm, even when he is no longer young. I was lucky enough to get a few bottles of the very brand that he drinks—first-class vintage year, too, my wine merchant tells me. They're in the cellar at this moment. I have half a mind to crack a bottle now, to drink old Tennyson's health and our very good selves. Do you feel like joining me?"

Swinburne, as eager now as a child hearing for the first time of "rainbow gold," and fretting at every moment's delay in setting out to find the exact spot where the bow touches earth, was sitting up in bed, chafing the palms of his hands together exultantly and impatiently.

"Oh yes, do get one up! How perfectly delightful! The very port which Tennyson drinks, and such a wine as you tell me!" He pushed the brandy-and-water aside,

almost with disfavour. "But do be quick; I'm dying to taste it." The port, casketted in a wicker cradle, and lying at an angle as little as possible out of the horizontal, so as not to disturb the beeswing, was carried, as carefully as if every drop were worth a fortune, to the bedside for Swinburne's inspection. Eulogizing the condition, colour and bouquet of the wine, Watts-Dunton filled two glasses, and the toast, "Tennyson, and our noble selves," was given. Swinburne drank his share ecstatically, with many a murmured: "Ah!" and "Nectar for the gods, indeed!" Watts-Dunton meanwhile grumbling contemptuously between his sips: "Brandy, forsooth! doctor's stuff! What poet would drug himself with brandy when he can get so divine a draught as this!"

And so brandy disappeared from Swinburne's table, and for a month or more the two friends—the one quaffing generously, the other sipping more cautiously—drank port together.

Then Watts-Dunton, affecting to rub his open palm over the small of his back, very much as sufferers from "that tired feeling" are pictured in quack medicine advertisements, grumbled: "I don't know how you feel, my boy, but you and I are not perhaps such rough and hardy Berserkers as old Tennyson, or it may be we don't get as much active exercise in the day as he, but I for one begin to find port a trifle heavy. One of the biggest wine-growers from the Continent told me the other day that Burgundy is the best of all drinks in a climate like ours. It is lighter than port, which is apt to clog the liver unless you are sparing with it. A glass or two of port to sip over your walnuts after dinner can't be beaten, but at any other time of the day, he says, whether at dinner or between meals, there is nothing in the world so fine as good, generous old Burgundy. It's blood-making, nerve-strengthening, body-building, brain-firing. It's the wine that our Dumas' immortal Three Musketeers, Athos,

Porthos and Aramis, not forgetting the finest fellow of them all, D'Artagnan, thrived on, made love on, fought on ; and most of all—you are half a Frenchman, you tell me—it is the wine of your own La Belle France. I picked up a case the other day, and I propose we sample a bottle at lunch, if only to drink to Dumas and the immortal three."

Again the ruse succeeded. Warned off brandy or warned off port for the very good reason that he was injuring his bodily health and unduly inflaming and exciting a too-inflammable and too-excitable brain, Swinburne would have paid no heed. Put as Watts-Dunton put it, the poet and the child in Swinburne responded. The Burgundy was broached, the immortal three toasted, and the poet vowed again and again that there was no such wine as the glorious Burgundy of old France, which for a month or two displaced the Tennyson port.

Then Watts-Dunton, with no little hair-

rumpling and hair-smoothing, delivered himself portentously somewhat as follows:

"I've been dining out a good deal lately; and, casting an eye around at the most exclusive clubs and elsewhere, I asked myself: 'What is it, after all, that *gentlemen* drink?' I'm no snob, I hope, and I use the word in this instance not only in the sense of birth and breeding, but in the sense of that selective instinct (it is born in the blood, I believe), that delicate and cultivated taste which is satisfied only with the best; and to the question, 'What is the best in the matter of wine?' there is only one answer—claret. Even Burgundy is a trifle coarse and gross beside it. The canaille won't, so I'm told, touch claret. Only an educated taste, only the palate of a connoisseur, can appreciate it. There is no other wine in the world which, in bouquet, in fragrance, in delicate and delicious flavour and aroma, can for a moment compare with the best claret."

Once again Swinburne was induced to

transfer his allegiance, this time from Burgundy to claret, just as he had previously transferred his allegiance from brandy to port, and from port to Burgundy. Then, having by such dear deceit lured a wayward and rebellious child, a half-irresponsible poet who was deaf to appeals of reason and self-interest, from the perilous place where he had been standing to one of less imminent danger, thence to surer foothold still, and then to comparative safety—Watts-Dunton made the final effort.

All this time, Swinburne, each step chosen for him by Watts-Dunton, was led to believe that he was acting by his own choice, and so he was led to believe to the last.

"There's a theory of mine, a pet theory, that I want to ask your opinion about." Thus Watts-Dunton to Swinburne after claret, and claret only, had held the field at The Pines for a month or so. "It is this, that wherever you are, you should drink the 'wine of the country.' If one is in Scotland, one drinks

the wine of the country, Scotch whisky; if in Ireland, Irish whisky; if in Germany, hock or German moselle; in France, graves, sauterne, claret, Burgundy or champagne; in Spain or Portugal, port; in Italy, chianti. What is our England's wine of the country? Why, whether drunk out of the cool depths of a pewter or china mug, in some quaint old English inn with diamond-paned windows, sanded floors and oaken benches, or out of a silver tankard from His Lordship's sideboard—the most refreshing, appetizing, stimulating, healthiest, best and most natural of all drinks for an Englishman is Charles Stuart Calverley's 'beverage for feasting gods,' Shakespeare's brown October, our own glorious and incomparable British beer!"

And so, to Shakespeare's brown October having thus lured Swinburne—to Shakespeare's brown October, otherwise bottled beer, Watts-Dunton thereafter kept his poet friend, and to the end.

CHAPTER II

"OH, THOSE POETS!"

SWINBURNE had carried me off to show me some bibliographical treasures he had recently acquired. At lunch he had had no more than his usual glass of beer, and when he rose from the table was as quiet and self-controlled as any of us. Upstairs, in his own room, however, the conversation chancing to turn upon a subject on which he felt keenly, he suddenly became extraordinarily excited, clasping and unclasping his hands convulsively, twitching his limbs, his eyes glittering unnaturally, the veins on the temples "cording" and pulsing visibly, until at last—I know it sounds preposterous to say so, but so it was—he had literally, if one may so word it, "talked himself drunk." "Inebriated by

the exuberance of his own verbosity," said Beaconsfield of Gladstone. There spoke the novelist, the coiner of phrases. What I have said of Swinburne is more than a phrase : it is a fact. Once again life plagiarized literature ; once again what had first existed as an idea in the brain of a man of imagination took form thereafter in actual flesh and blood. Swinburne had been talking rapidly, volubly, brilliantly, all the time, but now the talk poured out faster and more brilliantly than ever, with never a moment's hesitation in the choice of a word or an image. Yet every word was the golden word, every image was the one inevitable illustration from the physical world which, in an imaginative sense, counterparted the truth in the world of thought, on which the poet was expatiating. His voice, which, if thin and reedy, had considerable carrying power, was now keyed to a shriller note, and so must have reached the room below. Anyhow, I was aware of a scrambling step upon the stairs, and Watts-

Dunton entered, hurriedly and agitatedly. A glance at Swinburne told him all. White and worried, Watts-Dunton said to me—not in a whisper, for Swinburne's deafness made that unnecessary, but in a sort of "aside" which he hoped would escape the other's notice: "For God's sake, don't say another word to induce him to continue talking! He must be got to lie down, and if possible to sleep, or I shall have him half out of his mind to-night."

Though I was not conscious of having said or done anything unduly to excite Swinburne, I never recall the incident without gratitude to Watts-Dunton for his extraordinary gentleness—not only to Swinburne, whose very weakness, to say nothing of the love Watts-Dunton bore him, entitled the poet to such consideration, but also to me, by whom no such consideration was deserved. I felt that I ought, long before, to have observed that Swinburne was so unduly exciting himself as to threaten "a scene." From this I

ought to have done what was possible to guard him—*and* Watts-Dunton, on whom, as I well knew, the burden of all such trouble inevitably fell—by starting, conversationally, a hare of another colour, thereby to distract Swinburne's attention, and to set the greyhounds of his marvellous talk coursing in other directions.

Watts-Dunton, always thoughtful for others, instantly divined my uneasiness of mind.

"Don't be unhappy about this business, dear boy," he found time, even then, to say under his breath to me. "It's no fault whatever of yours. The same thing has happened over and over again. Now you know why I try to keep some of those, who have every right to be so left, from being left alone with Algernon. Some of them are jealous of my interference, as they call it, and say unkind things of me. They accuse me of jealously seeking to keep him away from them. It is true that I do so keep them away—one dear

soul especially, whom he loves, whom I love, and who I am sure loves him. But I don't do so for any such reason as is attributed to me. The dear soul of whom I speak is almost as excitable by nature as he. There is genius there, too. But the excitability of the one reacts on the excitability of the other, and then there is trouble for him and for me. When that dear soul whom I love and honour—but who thinks, I fear, unkindly of me—is gone, I have the very deuce of a time in trying to soothe and to quiet him. And in other cases, I know very well what some who come here say and think of me. I know the ungenerous impression—that I'm jealous, that I play the watch-dog (so I do)—which gets abroad. But on my soul, dear boy, what I do, in keeping him from certain folk, is done from love of Algernon, and in what seems to me the best interests of his great genius.

"I can't say all this, so I must be content to be misunderstood even by some whom

I love, and to be misrepresented by some who, I fear, don't like me. They abuse me while I'm alive, and one or two of them will, I know, slander me when I'm dead. It can't be helped, though few men wince more, or are pained more thus to be misunderstood than I.

"As for this afternoon's happenings, if anyone is to blame, it is I, for not foreseeing, earlier, that Algernon was in the mood and the condition to work up to an outbreak. Then I should have persuaded him to go straight off to sleep after lunch. In any case, I ought to have warned you not to let him talk too much, or too animatedly."

Here Swinburne, who, for all his excitement and irresponsibility, was clapping an uncommonly shrewd, if angry eye upon the pair of us, broke in :

"That is always the way," he said, addressing me, and vehemently. "Whenever I have the great luck to get a good fellow up here, to bear me company, to interest me by his

talk, and to be interested in mine—whenever that happens, which is rarely enough nowadays, God knows, and when the battle of wits is at its best—thought-rapier meeting and parrying thought-rapier, or thrusting home—in comes our dear, watchful Watts-Dunton, to carry off my good fellow companion, and to coax and to wheedle me to bed."

"Don't go!" he continued imploringly. "We'll finish our talk, Watts-Dunton or no Watts-Dunton."

The last-named was meanwhile emphatically negativing Swinburne's request by much portentous head-shaking and frowning at me over his friend's shoulder, and was striving, with almost a woman's patience and gentleness, to soothe the other's excitement. In the end, Watts-Dunton prevailed, and persuaded Swinburne to the siesta on which so much depended.

I have sometimes been asked whether the extraordinary influence which Watts-Dunton

exercised over Swinburne, Rossetti, and others was or was not due to some power mesmeric or magnetic, but here was no mesmerism nor magnetism, other than patience, forbearance, solicitude, understanding, and devotion. Watts-Dunton was, I happened to know, ill, tired, and overwrought that morning, for reasons of his own, but when those he loved had need of him he thought never of himself

Reservations there should and must be, when writing of the private life of those into whose home one is welcomed as a friend, and it was not my intention ever to tell this story in print. More than one intimate picture of life at The Pines has, however, recently been drawn ; the doors of that home have in a sense been thrown wide to the public eye ; and Swinburne's temperamental weaknesses and defects have been made the subject of discussion. For this reason, and because, since his death, unkind things have been said of Watts-Dunton's wardenship of Swinburne,

I no longer feel the same hesitation in putting this memory-impression on record. If of small worth in itself, it may serve to show that at least Watts-Dunton had no easy task, and that he discharged it in a spirit of self-sacrifice and sincerity.

CHAPTER III

GEORGE BORROW IN A FROCK-COAT

I DO not recall a face over which so many and such swiftly changing expressions passed as Swinburne's. Mischief, malice (only in the mischievous, not in the evil sense), anger, pity, sorrow, fun, hate, humour, scorn, and many another expression came and went there, as cloud-shadows chase each other across a field of corn. One subject there was which he barred. Had I been so stone deaf as to be unable to hear a word that was said, I should always have known, so long as I could have seen Swinburne's face, when Watts-Dunton was on the eternal subject, as it was with him, of gypsies.

The first symptom would be the fading

away of all light, interest, and animation from Swinburne's generally interested and animated face. I do not say I was reminded of the sudden darkening of a landscape which a few moments before had been flooded with sunlight, for though the glory and the glamour be then gone, the landscape itself remains unchanged.

When Watts-Dunton got upon his beloved, and to my thinking somewhat boring, subject of gypsies, Swinburne's face not only lost animation and interest (as a landscape might lose sunlight), but the expression so changed that in an Irish sense I should describe it as an expression in which there was no expression. Not only—again to use the landscape metaphor—had the sunlight faded away, but a mist had suddenly intervened, and so had made a mere negation, as it were, of what had been landscape.

Thereafter the poet relapsed into boredom so unrelieved that I was reminded of

what a certain wit once said when I mentioned the name of a man known to us both.

"Oh yes. You mean Headland," said the wit.

"'Headland'?" I repeated. "Why 'Headland'? That is not part of his name."

"Living near Hastings as you do," was the answer, "you must have noticed how Beachy Head seems to stand out, to brood over, and to dominate all that part of the coast."

"Often," I replied.

"Well, the habitual gloom of the friend of whom we are speaking is like that—it seems to brood and to dominate over every one and everything. That is why I call him Headland. He is a sort of Beachy Head, a headland, of unrelieved hump."

Similarly Swinburne's "speaking" face proclaimed aloud his unmitigated boredom at mention of gypsies. A bird, suddenly

finding itself trapped, might at first, and in search of a way out, turn its head this way and that with the same sudden, quick movement. Then, seeing that way out there was none—that Watts-Dunton was well astride of his hobby, and meant riding on—over Swinburne's face would come, first of all, the prodigious gloom of boredom. This gloom would sometimes give way to an almost angry glare in his pale green eyes, but thereafter he would relapse into such vacuum of brown study as never was, since this world was without form or void.

I, too, in my own way, wearied of Watts-Dunton's gypsy dissertations, and jibbed, conversationally, at mention of "Romany Ryes," "Romany chals," "dukkeripens," "gorgios," and the like. The fact is, that Watts-Dunton's gypsy talk always struck me as unreal. I do not for a moment doubt his sincerity, but I had long ago settled with myself that if this great-

hearted man, my dear friend, as he was, *had* a weakness (and as Emerson somewhere says, should an angel come to preach the moral law, we must be prepared to find that he keeps a bottle in a cupboard, or has some other habit or infirmity for which one must be ready to make allowance)—Watts-Dunton's weakness was surely something uncommonly like a "pose" in regard to gypsies. He delighted to think himself at heart half a gypsy. He never to my knowledge contradicted (I am not sure that it did not please him) the tradition, whence arising I do not know, that as a young man he had not only been closely associated with gypsies, but for a time had actually lived with them. I do not say it was all tradition, but I suspect accretions. The first great man on whom the youthful Watts-Dunton had set eyes was George Borrow. Then and there Lavengro won the boy's worship, and there is no worship more lasting than a boy's. Only the other

day a soldier friend of mine, fêted and lionized by his fellows, and decorated by the King for an act of consummate bravery, told me that when, by invitation, he re-visited his old school, he felt himself an entire nonentity, compared with the not very important or distinguished cleric who was still Head Master. My friend assured me that when, waiting in an ante-room, he first heard outside the door the voice which has once inspired terror in that little world, —his (my soldier friend's) heart jumped, and he was still conscious of the feeling of awe and trepidation with which he and others had once awaited the great man's entrance.

It was so, perhaps, that Watts-Dunton felt about George Borrow. The author of *Aylwin* had won his own place in the world, and was on terms of intimacy with men as fully entitled to respect as Borrow. But them Watts-Dunton had known before they had attained eminence. As Venus was

supposed to have had no mother, but to have arisen in immortal and perfect beauty from the foam of the sea, so—to strain fancy extravagantly—Borrow, when he first came within Watts-Dunton's ken, was already a god, and a god he remained in his hero-worshipper's eyes to the last. Comment has been made upon the fact that, remembering how closely associated Watts-Dunton was with men of marked personality, it is strange how little any of them seem to have influenced him. True as the remark may be of Rossetti, Swinburne, and others, it is not true of Borrow. His influence is evident in almost every page of *Aylwin*. Possibly had he not lived, and had Watts-Dunton not come under his influence early in life, *Alywin* would never have been written. It was, I suspect, solely because of Borrow's associations with gypsies that Watts-Dunton must needs assume something of the same picturesque pose. Being his only pose, it

may be forgiven him, but a pose it always seemed to me; and I am not sure that Swinburne's boredom and impatience at the mention of gypsies was not due to the fact that he felt very much as I felt upon the matter. Though Watts-Dunton liked to think of himself, and was pleased that others should think of him, as half a gypsy and all a Bohemian, he was, as a matter of fact, an eminently respectable suburban solicitor, conservative of habit and tastes, and so far from wishing to set at nought the established conventions, I am by no means sure that, in his heart, he did not entertain an unhappy, because secret and hopeless, passion for the late Mrs. Grundy. I say "hopeless" for the reason that he felt that, if not exactly "another's," she could, none the less, "never be his." The Borrow pose forbade the banns. Society (though never a suitor for her hand, Watts-Dunton liked to think of Dame Society as one of his Might-have-Beens, with whom

he occasionally permitted himself to exchange non-committal compliments) would have consigned such a bride and bridegroom to social Coventry. Society had accepted and approved the Borrow pose. She invited Watts-Dunton to her At Homes (only half-expecting him to come) because Borrow, being dead, Society thought well to applaud Borrovianism and Bohemianism, so long as not overdone. She might have elevated her eyebrows at Borrow in the flesh, have thought him over-large, over-loud, over-lusty, and likely badly to trample her carpets and to bring mud into the house. But Borrovianism in patent leather shoes and a frock-coat, wedded to Watts-Dunton's delightful manners and great reputation as an intimate of celebrities, was an attraction at Society's receptions. And all the while, had Borrow and Watts-Dunton been compelled to make shift with each other's company (as, for instance, on a desert island) for a week or two, what a disillusionment there would have been! As

it was, the two men met only rarely to exchange civilities and a few words at Dr. Hake's; and so to the last, Borrow—the first great man that Watts-Dunton ever saw—loomed large and godlike in his eyes, as first seen through the golden mists of a romantic boy's imagination.

While Watts-Dunton was indulging in Borrow and "Children of the Open Air" talk at receptions, he was in heart in the suburbs with Mrs. Grundy, and worshipping propriety as personified in Tennyson. He had deep personal love for Rossetti and for Swinburne, and may be said to have supervised, censored, and criticized both their lives and their poetry, but he stood in no awe of either, which he did of Tennyson, both as poet and as man. Not for Swinburne, nor for Rossetti, scarcely even for Shakespeare, had Watts-Dunton such worshipping reverence as for Tennyson and Borrow. So far as I am aware, the following sonnet to Tennyson on his eighty-second birthday has never been included in

any collection of Watts-Dunton's poems, nor in any anthology. Hence it is likely to be new to the reader:

If Nature loves thee, so does conquering Time;
The lyre that sixty years ago was strung
To beauty, when thy song of morn was sung,
Time touched with thee till beauty grew sublime.
The voice which ravished, in that morning rhyme,
Ears of a day now dead and lit its tongue,
Grown now to godlike—neither old nor young—
Rings through the world in an immortal prime.

Shall I, then, fear these fourscore years and two
That crown thy brow with eld's prerogative—
Wise thoughts and love and all that age can give?
Why should I fear, since nothing dare subdue
The song that helped our fathers' souls to live
And bids the waning century bloom anew?

The sonnet is saved by the last two lines. The twelve preceding lines are ordinary. Then, with the startlingness of a thunderclap on some slowly dragging day, seemingly too dull and ordinary for thunder, the sonnet suddenly rises, in the final line, at least, into the poetry that throbs and sings:

> The song that helped our fathers' souls to live
> And bids the waning century bloom anew.

CHAPTER IV

"IN THE DAYS OF OUR YOUTH": PHILIP MARSTON'S "HUSH!" STORY

THE fact that Swinburne "ran wild" in his early days is now so well known that to the telling of a story of those early days there can surely be no objection. It was told me by Philip Bourke Marston, the blind poet, to whom his godmother, Dinah Mulock Craig, author of *John Halifax, Gentleman*, addressed her well-known poem, "Look at me with thy large brown eyes, Philip, my king." That was, of course, when Marston was a child and before he was blind. It was to him that Rossetti addressed a lovely sonnet.

"Have you heard," Marston said one day

in the 'eighties, "why Swinburne left the Arts Club?"

I replied that I had *not* heard why Swinburne had left the club in question.

"And you have perhaps heard that he was expelled?"

"Yes, I have so heard," was the answer.

"Ah! that comes of trying to hush things up!" said Marston, anger coming into his beautiful but sightless eyes, and into his soft, musical, melancholy, half-lisping voice.

"If there is one thing," he went on, "of which I am certain, it is that I am not long for this world. Some of you will soon be following me to my last home under the daisies. There will be a line or two in the papers about the ending to the sad life of a young poet, and the *Athenæum* and the *Academy* will say, as kindly as possible, all that there is to be said—it isn't much—in their obituary column. Except that I shall be sorry never again to feel a woman's lips on mine, never to have a friend sit by my side,

smoking and sipping meanwhile at wine or whisky, to read me his poem or story, and that I shall be sorry never again to feel the throb, thrill, throes, pang and triumph that go to the birth of a lyric, a song or a sonnet—except for these, I don't very much care how soon it is that the big black extinguisher, Death, comes down upon the wind-flickered taper of my little life, and that I slip away into the Great Dark. Here I sit, night after night, often alone, by the fireside of this dingy room, in a dingy apartment house of this God-forsaken thoroughfare and harlots' walk of the Euston Road—to think, and to think, and to think, and often to drink, and to drink, and to drink, if only the drinking will drown or deaden the thinking. Some of you tell me that I drink too hard, that I'm injuring my health, shortening my life. Perhaps if you who so talk had to sit here, night after night, companioned only by *my* thoughts, in *my* loneliness, and in *my* darkness—perhaps *you* too would drink more

than is quite good for you, if only to escape from thinking. But when I'm gone and under the daisies (pretty soon it will be now), for God's sake don't try to hush up and to hide away whatever there was or is in my life that the world calls 'foolish,' or 'sinful,' or 'wrong.' Speak about it, openly and plainly. Then folk will say, 'Is that all? It might have been worse. In fact we thought it *was* worse,' and straightway they will forget it. But make a mystery of it, go about with finger on lip, crying, '*Hush! It is better not mentioned*,' and they will magnify it, lift up hands in horror, hint that it was a whole world of wickedness worse than it was, and whisper about it to whomever they meet, and wherever they go, as long as ever they live.

"It has been so," Marston went on, "about Swinburne and the Arts Club. Some of his friends tried to keep it a secret, and so set suspicion and mischief afoot, which are afoot still. Had they only been open about it all,

it would have been laughed over and forgotten long ago. Folk came to me with long faces, and said, 'Have you heard? Swinburne expelled from the Arts Club!' Then they nodded their silly heads and looked wise at me, with a whole world of meaning, as I could see, in their eyes." (Though blind, Marston always spoke of "seeing," and instantly resented any word or act which presupposed blindness on his part.)

"Then I tell them the facts as I am going now to tell you, after which, except perhaps for a moment's laugh, they never think of the thing again. The story is that Swinburne and a friend—the friend bore a well-known name—had been making a night of it, and thereafter took a cab to the club. A special committee meeting, which had for some reason been called, was then sitting. That it was well attended was evident from the number of hats—silk, opera, bowlers: it was before the days of crush hats—hanging upon the cloak-room pegs. From whom

the idea arose, Swinburne or his friend, I do not know, but some Puck-like spirit of mischief, seeing that the two were well-primed for such foolery, whispered to one or the other that, no one being just then present, here was a chance to perform 'the hat trick' in a new sense and in record time.

"Hastily collecting the hats from the pegs, the two Strayed Revellers placed them on the floor in two long parallel lines. Then, Swinburne and his friend each standing on his right foot at the end of one row of hats, his left ankle clasped in his left hand, the word: 'One — Two — Three. Go!' was given, and away in a wild, single-footed Frog's Dance the two racers went, each hop meaning the pancaking of a hat.

"Which won, I do not know, but when the scandalized attendant arrived, it was to find Swinburne and his friend breathless, and executing a triumphant war dance, amid a chaos of crushed hats, on the cloak-room floor. The committee, interrupted in their

sitting, hastily adjourned the meeting to the cloak-room. Here they found Swinburne and his friend, screaming with laughter over what each thought to be a gigantic joke. Failing to see the joke, the committee hastily held an emergency meeting, then and there, to pass, unanimously, a resolution expelling the two offending members from the club."

CHAPTER V

A. C. S. AND R. L. S.

SWINBURNE was a poet who "dropped"—not in the Silas Wegg sense, but in the sense that what he then wrote was inferior work—into prose. Stevenson was a prose writer who occasionally and successfully essayed verse. Swinburne trotted his protesting and jibbing Pegasus along the high-road of prose, instead of wing-beating his way in the air: Stevenson's fancy was to adorn the ankles of his mount, Mercury-wise, with wings, to make believe that he was flying.

Yet, gallant and knightly figures as both were, not unakin in tastes, each with a hankering after soldiering, and a close connecting link in their intimate friendship

with Mr. Gosse—it is surprising how little Swinburne and Stevenson were drawn the one to the other.

Stevenson's *Letters to his Family and Friends* may be said to sweep the whole field of contemporary literature and to stab out of the darkness, if only in a sentence, with the suddenness of a searchlight, a picture of this or that author, his pitfalls and his powers. Yet in the whole of the bulky two volumes, there is only a single and passing mention of Swinburne.

Swinburne, on the other hand, was only half-hearted in his appreciation of Stevenson. "His appreciation of Stevenson's novels was lessened by the author's self-consciousness and too purely literary style," writes Dr. A. Compton-Rickett in *The Letters of Swinburne*. "In Stevenson's stories the style is always disturbing the illusion, he would say."

Nor concerning Stevenson's verse was Swinburne more appreciative. The briefest

of all the many letters in the volume edited by Mr. Gosse and Mr. Wise runs as follows:

March 20, 1885.

My dear Gosse,

Many thanks for a very pretty little book which I have just read through with pleasure. My only criticism shall be that the type is too small for the eyes of such readers as it seemingly appeals to. Nursery books ought to be printed with the types of a Baskerville or a Bodoni.

Ever yours truly,
A. C. Swinburne.

To this letter the editors print a footnote: "This note would be too slight to merit publication were it not that the 'pretty little book' in question was R. L. Stevenson's *Child's Garden of Verse*. Of this author Mr. Gosse was, on many occasions, unable to extract a word of praise from Swinburne. Nor would he blame the friend of a friend; so that whenever the name of Stevenson was brought up, Swinburne preserved an obstinate silence."

Yet the two men had, as has been said, much in common. Both retained a boy's

freshness of impression, a boy's eager interests, as well as something of a boy's heart, and both were child-worshippers and childless.

Nor was either—I will not say adverse from advertisement—but I may at least say insensible to the value of being in evidence. In a letter to Henry James, Stevenson expresses his "indescribable admiration" of one of the *Literary Portraits* which Henry James had drawn. Speaking of the day when these portraits were to be collected in one gallery—that is to say, in a book—Stevenson pleads: "Do put me in." For an article on the—shall we say "unretiring" element in some authors, "Do put me in," as a title would be hard to beat. In Stevenson's case the very frankness of the request somewhat disarms criticism. To force an egotistic meaning upon what was possibly meant only to imply a very pretty compliment to Henry James, were ungenerous. Swinburne's businesslike recognition—his many unbusinesslike

characteristics notwithstanding—of the fact that the success, even of poetry, depends not a little upon advertisement, is evident from a letter to his publisher, to whom he writes: "I see no recent advertisement in the weekly papers. I must request that there may be enough of them inserted—as many as you think fit or useful, and as prominently."

Other points, not a few, Swinburne and Stevenson had in common; and here possibly some student of the writings of both may interpose: "You are forgetting the greatest of all their shared sympathies. What about the sea?"

To such a question, the natural man in me would be tempted to answer, coster-wise: "Wot abarht it?"

Between Stevenson's love of the sea and Swinburne's there can be no comparison. Stevenson was never happier than when afloat, and he had made long voyages. Swinburne's longest voyage was a Channel crossing, and had it been much longer he

would have been badly bored at that. He said to me once that the one thing which made him regret that he was not a man of wealth was that he could not afford to yield to the desire of his heart and spend half his time in sea cruising. He wished so to feel and to think ; and, poet-like, he had persuaded himself that he actually did so feel and think—just as, because he wished to think that his precious portrait of Victor Hugo was a snapshot, he was equally sure that a snapshot and nothing else it was. But a long sea cruise—in imagination a joy—Swinburne would as a reality have found unendurable. The monotony, the being thus cabined and restricted in movement, would have irked him beyond measure. Into what unwisdom —if only thereby to escape from boredom—he might have been led, had he for any length of time found himself aboard ship, only a Watts-Dunton can say, just as with such unwisdom only a Watts-Dunton could have dealt. Luckily for himself and for

Swinburne, this at least the author of *Aylwin* was spared.

Swinburne loved the sea, in the sense of being by the sea and of swimming in the sea. The rest was self-deception. The belief he entertained that Nature intended him for a sailor (he repeatedly spoke to me of the sea as his "natural element") was one of those dear delusions which, in some shape or form, most of us entertain, and even cherish about ourselves. Stevenson's sea love was a sailor's, and sea born :

> This be the verse you grave for me :
> Home is the sailor, home from sea.

Swinburne's was no more than a poet's—imagined, and land born. The one had the brine in his blood ; the other only at the point of his pen.

CHAPTER VI

THE LAUREATESHIP; A CARTOON IN THE "PALL MALL GAZETTE"; AND SOME WOMAN POETS WHOSE WORK SWINBURNE ADMIRED

"I FOUND myself at thirty very much what I was at thirteen, so I have some reason to fear that if I live so long, I shall find myself on the same points (like Landor) very much the same at seventy as I was at seventeen."

So wrote Swinburne to his friend Watts-Dunton in a letter quoted in *The Letters of Algernon Charles Swinburne*, issued under the editorship of the late Mr. Thomas Hake and Dr. A. Compton-Rickett. This and a later and much fuller collection, *Swinburne's Letters*, edited by Mr. Edmund Gosse and Mr. T. J. Wise, together with the volume of

letters to his family and herself, published some year or two ago by the poet's cousin, Mrs. Disney Leith, cover the whole field of Swinburne's correspondence.

Swinburne's expressed expectation of finding himself, upon one point at least, "very much the same at seventy as I was at seventeen," may, not without interest, be compared with a statement in *The Letters of Algernon Charles Swinburne*. "It may be truly said," write the editors, "that in the deepest sense of the word, the later Swinburne was far more sensitive to religious influences, and far more spiritual in his attitude towards life, than was the author of *Poems and Ballads*."

To this I would add that Swinburne lived, not only to change some of his views, but also to deplore some of his earlier writings, especially those in which he had assailed Christianity and its Founder. He said to me once, that one poem in particular he would give a great deal to be able to recall.

"But to do so," he declared, with a hope-

less gesture, "would be to draw attention to it afresh. The printed and published word cannot be suppressed. It is like a poisonous growth of which Watts-Dunton was telling me. You cut it down to burn stalk and flower and seed, that it may not propagate. You dig it up root and branch, as you think, and in a few weeks' time you find that some accursed root, fibre, or filament, which had evaded your search, has but become newly virile by the cutting away of older parts, and has concentrated into its diabolical and underground self the vitality which had spent itself more or less harmlessly above ground and in the open air. Thus, as in the Biblical story of the man out of whom devils had been cast, the latter state of your garden is worse than the first. It is so with my unhappy poem. Any effort to suppress it would but advertise the thing afresh, and would prompt dishonest publishers and disconscienced 'collectors' (disconscienced, to coin not too strong a word, not a few

enthusiastic collectors eventually become) to reprint the thing, even if privately; and so by putting what I may call 'a price upon its head,' to give it new importance and value. I fear it must lie where it lay."

Nor was religion the only matter upon which he lived to change his views.

To a friend who had apparently anticipated the appointment of Swinburne to the Laureateship after the death of Tennyson, he wrote: "Let me conjure you not to inflict on me the discredit by anticipation implied in the title of future Laureate, an office for which I expect to see all the poeticules of New Grub Street pulling caps after the death of Tennyson."

This was penned in 1874, and Tennyson lived till 1892.

I am by no means sure that the Swinburne who was once a rebel and a republican, but in later life was more inclined to acquiesce in than to defy the canons of conventionality, and as years went by became a Conservative,

would, in the event of Tennyson's death, have held the succession to the Laureateship in the same contempt.

Mr. Gosse commits himself no farther than to say: "It is reported that Queen Victoria, discussing the matter with Gladstone, said: 'I am told that Mr. Swinburne is the best poet in my dominions.'" I have reason to believe that Queen Victoria did actually so express herself; and I have reason too for believing that a visit which the late Sir James Knowles paid to The Pines, after the death of Tennyson, was not altogether without a purpose. That purpose was not, as I have heard stated, to sound the poet in regard to his accepting or not accepting the Laureateship, if offered. On the contrary, I believe that Sir James Knowles' errand was not to sound Swinburne on that or any other subject, but delicately, perhaps almost indirectly, to convey to him the reason why the Laureateship could not be offered to him, and that Swinburne entirely approved the reason in

question. As Mr. Gosse indicates, it was not unconcerned with what Swinburne had once written about the Czar. The erroneous impression in regard to Sir James's visit was gathered from something said by Watts-Dunton. A certain person, chancing to hear of the visit, inquisitively tried to "draw" the author of *Aylwin*. Watts-Dunton, who resented any attempt of the sort, was at first minded to reply: "That is Mr. Swinburne's business, not mine nor yours," but characteristic amiability preventing him, he returned an evasive answer, in which his zeal and his jealousy for his friend's reputation made it possible to put the flattering interpretation upon the visit.

Swinburne himself was not a little angered at this time by a cartoon which appeared, I think, in the *Pall Mall Gazette*.

It depicted certain poets of the day as competitors in a Parnassus scaling race for the Laureateship. It was not because Swinburne saw himself pictured as a competitor

that he was angry, but because he saw himself so pictured in company with the late Eric Mackay, a poet from whose unappreciated attentions Swinburne had been suffering. Mackay, who was an enthusiastic admirer of Swinburne, had written what the latter considered a fulsome and offensively flattering letter, in which he expressed the intention of dedicating a book of his own poems to Swinburne. No reply being received, Mackay sent a second letter to the same effect; and a reply to this second letter not being forthcoming, a third, which, like its predecessors, remained unanswered. I am not sure that a fourth or even a fifth letter was not sent, but Swinburne remaining obdurately silent, Mackay wrote to Watts-Dunton, inquiring whether Swinburne had received or had not received the letters in question, and if so, why no answer had been returned. Watts-Dunton, who had more than enough to do to answer his own letters, and moreover was annoyed by the

assumption that any one had the right to call him to account on the question of Swinburne answering or not answering letters, was disposed at first to leave what he considered an impudent communication without a reply. Again, however, his incurable amiability prevailed, and he wrote Mackay as nearly as I remember to the following effect:

DEAR SIR,

I have received your communication in which you are good enough to inform me that Mr. Swinburne—whom you say you do not know personally—has failed to reply to certain letters sent by you to this address. I know nothing about the matter, but may point out that if Mr. Swinburne had replied, his doing so would have been a courtesy. In not replying, as is you tell me the case, he is surely, since you do not know him personally, within his rights. Were I you, I should so regard the matter, and dismiss it from consideration. He is to my knowledge an uncertain correspondent, and often leaves letters of importance unanswered. In any case, the matter is no business of mine, nor

one in which I can interfere, so, with much regret, I remain,

Yours truly,

THEODORE WATTS-DUNTON.

There one might have supposed the matter would have ended. The advice given was obviously sensible, and Mackay would have done well to follow it. He did not do so. Having ascertained, or being already aware, that Swinburne's custom was each morning to take a walk, generally in a certain direction, Mackay laid his plans accordingly, and Swinburne, pelting along deep in thought, found himself suddenly pulled up by a stranger, who stepped out and across his path.

"I believe I have the honour of addressing Mr. Swinburne, the great poet," said the stranger, raising his hat with a ceremonial bow.

"My name is Swinburne. What do you want of me?" inquired the poet suspiciously, misliking his man, as he thereafter said, at sight.

"May I have the honour of a few words with you, sir? My name is Eric Mackay. I wrote to you——"

"Certainly not. I do not know you, sir. Good morning," Swinburne snapped, cutting him short, and stamping indignantly away to continue his walk.

The next morning brought another letter from Mackay. It was not complimentary, but all I need say of it here is that it conveyed the information that the writer's forthcoming book of poems would *not* be dedicated to Algernon Charles Swinburne. Then, at last, Swinburne sent Mackay a letter. As I remember it, the text was as follows:

Mr. Swinburne has received a letter from a Mr. Mackay—whom he does not know—in which Mr. Mackay informs Mr. Swinburne that he does *not* propose dedicating any book of his to Mr. Swinburne, nor, indeed, of so much as mentioning his name in future, by which decision Mr. Swinburne is honoured, and relieved.

Eric Mackay was not the only contemporary bard on whom Swinburne was severe, as when he inquired concerning Lewis Morris: "Who is he—Tennyson's under-butler?" but against no one, remembering that the two had once been friends, was he so bitter as against W. Bell Scott. He even permitted himself scornful reference to Rossetti, when explaining that it was Rossetti's "derogatory and dignity-forgetting habit" of writing letters to strangers which had brought Bell Scott, then a drawing-master, "into a circle into which he should never have been admitted." Rossetti had seen a poem in a magazine, and had written in "impulsive and expansive praise" to the author. "With what result?" demanded Swinburne furiously. "This—that the fellow, who was morose, jealous, and envious, came at last to hate Rossetti with ineradicable, deadly and venomous hate."

Another bard he disliked was Roden Noel. I knew Noel, and, admiring some of his

poems, said as much to him one day. To my surprise he replied: "I am glad you do, for if you did not, I could never like you, nor, for the matter of that, any one else who did not like my work." This staggering remark so lessened my interest in Noel that I entered no protest when, mentioning him to Swinburne one day, I added that I had been told, whether rightly or wrongly I did not know, that Noel was related to Byron, Swinburne viciously replied: "Even poets must be allowed their poor relations. If Noel be a relation to Byron, he is, intellectually at least, a poor relation. Compared with Byron, intellectually, he is infantile—a sort of Baby Byron, a Booby Byron, if you like." I suspect that the fact that I had previously told Swinburne that Robert Buchanan was perhaps Noel's most intimate friend was more responsible for the alliterative onslaught than anything "infantile" either in Noel's poems, intellect, or personality.

Of two women poets of the younger school

I heard Swinburne speak with very marked respect. One was Mrs. Clement Shorter. "Technically," he said, "some of her work, like not a little of Mrs. Browning's, is somewhat imperfect. In Mrs. Shorter's case, what in any one else one would call and count imperfection, seems not so much imperfection as a variant from type. Do you know a flower called the Rose of Sharon?—and, by the bye, if there should be anything so English and so countrified, so human and so natural in Paradise, as an old English public-house, what a perfect title 'The Rose of Sharon' would be! 'The Rose of Sharon!'—really, I should feel quite reconciled to the orthodox heaven if only I could be certain of finding anything so delightful there as a 'Rose of Sharon' public-house. But what I was going to say is that Walter was showing me a petal of the Rose of Sharon the other day, and, unlike most flowers (he says), if you bisect a petal the two halves would not be exact halves, as the Rose of Sharon petal

is a little lop-sided. But although this flower differs from most other flowers by having a slightly irregular petal, it is not any the less lovely: it is not an imperfection—it is only a variant from type, like your friend Mrs. Shorter's poems. And she is not any less a poet for that reason than I am less a flower-lover than Watts-Dunton. His knowledge of flowers is scientific; mine isn't. He is a botanist; I'm not. But I really believe that my love of flowers is born of something deeper in me than there is, so far as flowers are concerned, in him, for all his botanical precision and knowledge; and though I grant that he is the better botanist, I do not concede that he is a truer flower-lover, any more than I think our Irish woman poet is any less a true poet than some others, the petals of whose poems are strictly 'regular,' and because she sings, as the Rose of Sharon blows, in the wild, sweet way that Nature taught her."

Swinburne was also extremely interested

in the poems of "E. Nesbit" (Mrs. Hubert Bland). He did not confine himself to an expression of admiration, but did what I knew him to do only in the case of Francis Hindes-Groome—went out of his way to bring her work to the friendly notice of reviewers.

One of the most lovable of men and kindest of editors was the late F. W. Robinson, the novelist; but he was no judge of poetry, as witness the fact that he accepted and printed every scrap of verse I sent to the magazine he was then editing. Knowing that Swinburne held Robinson's opinion on poetry as of small worth, I was surprised that he should expatiate at length to the latter on the power and beauty of Mrs. Bland's poems. Robinson had seen the book, and, possibly more to please Swinburne than because he really appreciated its beauty, he attempted some complimentary, but lengthy and not very illuminating criticisms.

Swinburne, most easily bored of men (he

wrote of one whom he really loved, one whom he would have moved heaven and earth to serve—John Nicoll: "I won't see Nicoll again! He spent the time reading his own stuff to me"), cut Robinson's criticisms short impatiently: "Yes, yes, my dear Robinson. Every one talks kind things about Miss Nesbit's poems. But those who admire must do more than talk. They must do what they can to make the book more widely known—to make it sell. Can you review it anywhere?"

Robinson replied that there was no journal to which he contributed reviews, but suggested that a notice should appear in his own little publication, *Home Chimes*.

"That will do," said Swinburne. "A most admirable little magazine, to which Watts-Dunton and I have had the honour to contribute. Who does the reviewing there?"

Robinson replied that there was no review section, but he could write and work in a little paragraph about the book.

Swinburne was clearly not satisfied by the promise of a paragraph by Robinson, perhaps because he hoped for something more important than a paragraph, perhaps because he thought that no weight attached to Robinson's opinion of poetry. "Who else writes for you?" he asked.

"Jerome does a 'Gossips' Corner,'" was the reply.

"Jerome K. Jerome! the man for whose delightful contributions—so fresh and joyous in their humour—we look with such interest," said Swinburne. "That portion of your magazine, 'Gossips' Corner,' is very widely read. I think if you can persuade Mr. Jerome to say something about E. Nesbit's book there, it would help much more than an isolated paragraph would."

And so it came about that a considerable space of "Gossips' Corner" was devoted to the "discovery of a new poet," E. Nesbit, who, I may mention, is the sister of Mary Nesbit, to whom Philip

Marston was engaged. A pathetic story, first appearing in a popular American journal, and since reprinted in this country, has been circulated concerning the circumstances of Mary Nesbit's death. It is that Philip, entering the room where she had been reading, called her by name. As she did not answer, he thought her to be sleeping, and so felt his way, blind man as he was, toward her seat, that he might waken her by a caress—to find her dead. This story, told in what one would assume to be a well-informed quarter, had only the smallest foundation in fact. In *Swinburne's Letters* there is one to Philip Marston on the subject of E. Nesbit's book of poems, *Lays and Legends.*

THE PINES,
PUTNEY HILL, S.W.
November 15, 1886.

MY DEAR PHILIP,

Some days ago I called Watts' attention to what struck me as the remarkable

merit of some poems in a volume I had lately received from the author—poems which reminded me, in some of their finer characteristics, rather of your own than of any other contemporary's. I am naturally much interested to hear of your connection with the author.

I thought "Absolution" certainly a powerful poem—perhaps as much in the style of Lee Hamilton's poems as of yours—very well conceived and constructed. I had read before (I forget where, but quite lately) "The Singing of the Magnificat," and it had struck me as something quite out of the common in conception. It is a pity the closing couplet should be so flat, but that might easily be remedied.

"Baby's Birthday" is a charming little piece, and I am rather fastidiously exacting with respect to poetry on the great subject of "Baby."

The first part of "Children's Playgrounds in the City" I like very much; and the whole of the poem called "The Dead to the Living" is powerfully pathetic.

Come and see me, if you can, on Friday next, and I will read you a lyric made near Beachy Head, while returning from a long

walk thither. I am very much in love with Eastbourne. Do you know it?

Ever sincerely yours,

A. C. SWINBURNE.

P.S.—I had forgotten to mention the poem "Two Christmas Eves," which struck me as singularly powerful and original; the sort of poem that Charlotte Brontë might have written if she had had more mastery of the instrument of verse.

One other remark of Swinburne's concerning a woman poet—this time not a contemporary—occurs to me. Calling one day, unexpectedly, at The Pines, I found him alone. He was standing by the book-case—Watts-Dunton's, not his own—with an open volume in his hand; and I knew by the way he had pursed his lips—so that he whistled rather than breathed every time he took a breath—and by the fact that he was bobbing up and down upon his toes, but without shifting his feet (reminding me of the way one jigs a child when playing at "Ride-a-

cock horse to Banbury Cross"), that he was excited about something.

For once—punctilious almost to formality as Swinburne was in the courtliness with which he met or parted from a caller, no matter whether that caller were stranger or intimate friend—he omitted the conventional greeting.

"I'm so glad you have come," he said, "for one likes to share one's finds. I had forgotten this thing's very existence, and lighted on it only by chance when looking for something else."

With a great parade of gravity—mock-gravity, for the twinkle in his eye belied the judicial stateliness — he beckoned me to a chair, and then flopped the book on the table in front of me, pointing slyly to an inscription on the fly-leaf. The volume was, I believe, *The Lady of the Lake;* but, in any case, it was a presentation copy from Sir Walter Scott of one of his own works to Joanna Baillie, and in the

inscription he hailed Joanna as a "Sublime Genius."

"And I am not allowed," Swinburne commented, "to pay my tribute to the immortal Hugo, without being told that my piling-up of superlatives is preposterous, and that my pæans of praise-giving hyperbole make ridiculous alike the praiser and the praised."

CHAPTER VII

A SONNET IN THE "ATHENÆUM," AND MORE "DEAR DECEIT"

IN the collection of Swinburne's letters for which Mr. Gosse and Mr. T. J. Wise are responsible, there is a letter to the former in which Swinburne writes of a new poem of his, "On the Cliffs":

"Watts—as I possibly may have told you —says (what a man generally likes to hear of his latest work) that it is *the* best poem I ever wrote."

To this the editors append a note in which they remark, and truly: "It may be observed that Watts said this on every successive occasion."

If I may speak in terms of finance, I should say that Watts-Dunton was always

prepared to honour Swinburne's note of hand on presentation. He not only kept, as it were at a bank, a generous balance of praise upon which Swinburne could draw at pleasure; he went even further, and on one occasion, within my knowledge, drew a blank cheque in Swinburne's favour. A friend of theirs had died, and on opening the *Athenæum*, of which (minus the advertisement page) I nearly always saw an advance copy, I found a memorial sonnet by Swinburne, and an obituary notice by Watts-Dunton, in which he referred to "Mr. Swinburne's noble sonnet."

This was on Thursday afternoon, the *Athenæum* publishing day being Friday; and Watts-Dunton called to see me almost as I laid down the journal.

"I have just been reading you in to-morrow's *Athenæum*," I said. "You have never written a more beautiful memorial article."

He made a modest depreciatory gesture,

but his eyes were ashine, as always happened when he was pleased by an appreciative word.

"But do you really think Swinburne's sonnet is what you call it—'noble'?" I asked. "Few can lord it in a spacious Pleasure-House of Song like Swinburne; but when he elects to enter the exquisite Gothic chapel in miniature, which we call a sonnet—more like a cell than a chapel, in its chased and carved compactness and austerity—he seems to me so ill at ease as sometimes to be almost ineffective. He has written noble sonnets, but of this one 'noble' is almost the last word I should have used."

Watts-Dunton's face fell like a scaffolding when a workman knocks away the underpinning. Evidently he was perturbed. "The fact is, my dear boy," he explained, "that I had not read the sonnet when I wrote my notice, and indeed haven't seen it yet."

He lifted my *Athenæum*, and, with eyes close to the page, pored laboriously, as some

short-sighted person might pore, over the lines. Then he emitted an uneasy "Ah-h-h!" and, forgetful of my presence, sat back wandering-eyed, wrinkled of brow, troubled of face, like one seeking a way out of a difficulty.

"A bad business!" he said absently—for him almost irritably. "As a rule I see practically everything that Swinburne writes. It so happens that this particular sonnet I didn't. You are quite right. It is woolly; it is unworthy of him. I wish it had never seen print. I wish, immeasurably, that I hadn't spoken of it, but Maccoll (the editor) wanted to get Swinburne's sonnet and my notice into this week's issue, and, without seeing what Algernon had written, I thought that just for once I might draw a bow at a venture and speak of his sonnet as I did. A bad business!"

Then he went on to say that it had been his habit for a long time "to perjure himself, if one so liked to call it," by invariably

praising anything and everything, in the shape of a new poem, which Swinburne brought to him.

"If I can," Watts-Dunton said, "I assure him that he has never done anything better, and I'll tell you how the state of things came about. There was a time, it is many years ago, when, as a result of the careless way he was living, he had got himself into such indifferent health, both of body and mind, that all he wrote was worthless; and at last he was persuaded in his own mind that the power ever again to write poetry was gone. Then one day he brought me, timidly and diffidently, something he had attempted, which seemed to him, he said, passable. When I vowed that the verses were the best he had ever written, he seemed like another man, and went away as gleefully as a child. That was the turning-point, and thence onward the lost gift came back little by little, until at last he had regained something like his old powers.

"A long time after, he remarked doubtfully of the same poem: 'This thing strikes me as very indifferent stuff, but I remember when I first showed it to you that you said it was the best thing I had ever done. Is that your opinion still?'

"'No, my dear Algernon,' I averred stoutly. 'I think it is the very worst.'

"To tell him so then did no harm, as his confidence in himself and in his power to do good work was restored. Had I so told him at the time, he might have relapsed into the slough of despair and apathy into which he had sunk, and out of which I was trying to lift him. But disingenuousness of that sort, even with the best of intentions, has its danger. Having got him versing again, I wished to keep him versing, and feared, in those early days, when his recovery was unassured and seemed so conditional, to throw him back by any rough word or wind of criticism. And so, to my shame—I must throw myself on the mercy of my friends and

his friends—I got into the way of praising, whenever it was humanly possible to do so, whatever he brought me; and so far as I can see, not until death comes to call the one or the other of us away, and so to deliver me out of the coils into which I have got myself, shall I be set free."

CHAPTER VIII

"PUCK OF PUTNEY HILL"

SINGULARLY happy as was the relationship between Swinburne and Watts-Dunton, the friendship began with a stock in common of the smallest. Swinburne was an aristocrat. The peerage on his father's side had, I understood him to say, been extinct for some centuries. The Swinburnes were a Border family, and in the poet's own words, "Hotspur's lineal blood in direct descent" was in his veins. On his mother's side he was a grandson of the Earl of Ashburnham.

Watts-Dutton was of middle-class stock. He was educated at some private school of no traditions, and afterwards by his father, whereas Swinburne was at Eton and Balliol.

The Swinburnes were Anglicans with Catholic forbears; Watts-Dunton was brought up as a Nonconformist, and, as he said to me more than once, his "leanings were strongly Nonconformist."

These widely differing starting-points and standpoints heightened rather than lessened the friendship. Even those who most love the sound of their own voice soon tire of speaking words to be repeated by an echo. There is no interchange of ideas with those who think exactly as we think, whereas, as George Meredith has said: "Dissent rings out finely."

The very dissimilarity of starting-points and standpoints—accepted as facts by each, and so never discussed—which existed between Swinburne and Watts-Dunton lent uncertainty, and so lent interest to the other's views.

Only in regard to Swinburne's Puck-like love of mischief and leg-pulling was the understanding between the two imperfect.

To have been accounted deficient in a sense of humour—his own was of a somewhat heavy order—would have aroused Watts-Dunton's hurt and wrathful resentment. Hence, though his friend's mischievous and impish moods troubled and perplexed him, Watts-Dunton affected always to be vastly and indulgently amused by them. But there was more of uneasiness than of mirth in his laughter. He was too loyal a friend to admit as much even to himself, for even to himself he was the partisan and champion of those he loved; but could he, with the impartiality of which he was constitutionally incapable, have sat down in cold blood to try to arrive at his real, if private opinion of Swinburne's perverseness, that opinion would have been that he "did not know which way to take it." Mr. Kipling has entitled a book *Puck of Pook's Hill*. Small wonder if Watts-Dunton found his friend something of a "Puck of Putney Hill." To-day Swinburne paid you a pretty compliment by averring that yours

was the shapeliest of legs. To-morrow he paid you a still prettier compliment—for he was stiffly formal to all whom he did not choose to welcome within his own circles, and the fact that he tried to "draw" you was proof in itself of his liking and trust—by pulling the same leg vigorously.

I remember an allusion being made to Watts-Dunton's famous *Encyclopædia Britannica* article on Poetry.

For the moment I thought Swinburne was really angry; his eyes, as well as his voice, seemed to snap as he said: "I *knew* we should come to that article sooner or later. Just as surely as when Walter's friend, Mr. Hall Caine—with heart big to breaking, a brain clammy with perspiring thought, is brought to birth of a letter in a widely circulated newspaper—just as surely as when that happens we know that Mr. Caine has a new novel ready for the market, just as every road is said to lead to Rome, so, in this house, whenever there is talk of poetry, the

road inevitably leads to that *Encyclopædia* article."

I had just told a story. Swinburne had thoroughly enjoyed it—rarely have I seen him enjoy a story more—and was in high good humour; so this sudden manifestation of something like temper—the snap, as it were, in passing, at the calves of Caine, the dog-in-the-mangerish growl (for one generally so generous) at mention of the very article which Watts-Dunton had so often heard Swinburne enthusiastically praise — took Watts-Dunton not a little by surprise.

I see him now, as he laid down knife and fork—he was carving at the time—to cast an anxious, brow-wrinkled, and troubled, but uncommonly shrewd and penetrating look at the speaker. Possibly he was relieved to catch a glint of fun in Swinburne's eyes, but even so, his extraordinary loyalty to a friend would not allow the gibe at Hall Caine to pass without a protest.

"It is not at all necessary to remind me

that Caine is my friend rather than yours," Watts-Dunton replied. "He is a writing fellow, of course, and the ways of the writing fellows are not your ways, and I hope not mine. But Caine has a heart of gold. In some ways he is among the salt of the earth, and really I must protest, my dear Algernon, against what you have just said about him, for he doesn't in the least deserve it. It may be true of some writing fellows, but it isn't true of him."

"I do not wish to discuss the merits or the demerits of your friend Mr. Caine," answered Swinburne severely. "They do not interest me. I merely observed, and repeat it, that whenever the subject of poetry is mentioned, I know that sooner or later we shall arrive at the *Encyclopædia* article."

Watts-Dunton, disturbed, and taking the matter very seriously, rumbled self-defensively to the effect that he had always been given to understand that Swinburne liked the article.

"I do like it," retorted Swinburne, speaking with sharp decisiveness. "It is monumental. It is a Great Pyramid of criticism, standing almost alone, as it were, in a sandy desert of dry, arid, lifeless criticism. But think how badly I was treated in the matter of that article. I had forgotten the whole affair until this morning, when something brought it back to memory."

"Badly—you—were—treated!" repeated the mystified Watts-Dunton, peering at his friend from under his brow with bright, bird-like, but troubled eyes. "Why, how's that?"

Swinburne turned to me. "Baynes, the editor, meant, I understand, to ask either Matthew Arnold or myself to write the article on Poetry. Then Robertson-Smith, the other editor, happened to come across something that Walter here had written on the subject, and although it was unfinished, and exceeded the allotted length, nothing would do but that Robertson-Smith should clap it in as it was;

and Arnold and I were cuckoo'd out of our chance by a hated rival and interloper who pretended to be our very good friend."

"What a memory you have!" ruminated the much-relieved Watts-Dunton. "'Pon my word, I believe you are right, and that Robertson-Smith did happen to see something of mine on poetry, and then and there decided that it would suit his purpose. But you are not quite correct in saying that it went in as it was. Robertson-Smith—man of immense knowledge; he impressed me so much that when he was present I forgot every one else—made a few marginal alterations, and they were so marvellous, absolutely marvellous, that I adopted every one, every one! But, my dear Algernon, you would have done an infinitely finer article than I ever could. I had no idea that you were feeling sore about it. Why on earth didn't you speak of it before? Why nurse a grievance for years and spring it upon me this morning?"

There, so far as Swinburne was concerned, the matter ended. By what tactful remark (no one could be more tactful when so minded) he had soothed Watts-Dunton and turned the conversation I am unable to say. Some remark which a fellow-guest, Francis Hindes-Groome, made to me caused me to miss Swinburne's reply. The whole incident was trivial, and I put it on record here only because it seems to me to bear upon what I have said of the rare occasions when the understanding between the two friends was imperfect. Watts-Dunton, as I have said, had taken the matter seriously, which Swinburne had never intended. That the latter had, the next minute, entirely dismissed the whole thing from consideration was evident. Not so Watts-Dunton. He was troubled about it, was brooding over it, and wondering whether more lay behind, as was clear from the shadow which rested on his face for the remainder of the afternoon.

His tendency to magnify trifles—to be

over-anxious, almost to fussiness, concerning Swinburne was good for neither.

Sometimes it came near to making both ridiculous. In *The Letters of Swinburne* there is a passage which one might think had been taken from a burlesque of the book, rather than from the book itself:

A visitor had let fall some remark about Hazlitt's critical work, and Swinburne's face assumed an expression of frozen anger.

"We don't mention Hazlitt's name here," said Watts-Dunton in a hurried whisper, as if reference had been made to an objectionable neighbour. "Neither I nor Swinburne care to talk about him on account of his abominable treatment of Coleridge."

Could anything more comically recall Alice in Wonderland and the Mad Hatter?

Reverting to Swinburne's lodged protest against all mention of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* article, my explanation of the matter is simple. As I have said, he had enjoyed the story I had told. He was in the

mood for stories—hoped, perhaps, that more would be forthcoming, or, more likely still, was consuming with impatience to tell what he considered a particularly good story of his own. Hence he was not disposed to have the gaiety eclipsed by the interpolation of a dark body (in the shape of a very solid and chunk-like *Encyclopædia Britannica* article) between the sunshine, the laughter, and ourselves. That was why he had snapped in passing at the calves of Hall Caine, concerning whom Watts-Dunton had already irked Swinburne by telling in full the facts concerning the writing of Caine's novel, *The Shadow of a Crime* (they would fill a chapter were I to tell them here). A chance apologetic reference to the indifference of his carving by Watts-Dunton—he had splashed the cloth—gave me the opportunity to switch off the conversation from Hall Caine's novel to a carving story. Either the switch off or the story had delighted Swinburne, and his exasperation when the *Encyclopædia* article

threatened a return to serious subjects was the one and only cause of his speaking as he did of Caine and of the article.

Perhaps I may be allowed to end this chapter by telling the story—recalled to mind by what Watts-Dunton said of his carving—which amused Swinburne.

With Coventry Patmore and his two sons, Milnes and Tennyson (one, I believe, the godson of Lord Houghton, the other of the Laureate), I had, many years ago, some acquaintance. Coventry Patmore and his son Tennyson I knew only slightly, but Milnes Patmore and I often foregathered, and it was, I think, he who told me this story of his doctor brother.

At the beginning of Dr. Tennyson Patmore's medical career, when he was only a student, he dined at the house of a well-known Society woman whom we will call Lady Alice. Not without weaknesses of her own—for, though nearer sixty than fifty, she made herself something of a laughing-

stock by affecting and dressing the part of a young woman—Lady Alice was uncommonly hard upon the weaknesses of other folk. Next to being thought young, she loved to be thought witty. What she took to be wit was often no more than rudeness, for she had a sharp tongue, of which others were made to feel the edge, with no thought of, or consideration for, their feelings. Mr. Tennyson Patmore, who was then, his brother said, a young medical student, and shy with the modesty which is so much more acceptable in very young men than assurance, had been asked to carve a chicken. Carving did not then happen to be one of his accomplishments, but the bird was on the table directly in front of him, and, rather than decline to do as asked, he had manfully done his best, the said "best" being rather bad for the bird, as well as for the tablecloth.

Looking down the table, and seeing a young and shy guest in difficulties, Lady Alice, instead of turning a blind eye or trying

to cover her guest's confusion, as most hostesses or any considerate woman would have done, chose instead to advertise her alleged wit by calling down the table rude things about her guest's carving. What it was she said I am not sure, but I remember that she ended by remarking: "Well, Mr. Patmore, you may be, for all I know, a very clever surgeon, but looking at your carving and my cloth, I can only say that if I wanted a leg off I should not come to you to do it."

"And then my exasperated brother, generally the most courteous and considerate of men," said Captain Milnes Patmore, in telling me the incident, "made the one rude, but, in view of the provocation he had received, I can't help thinking pardonable remark of his life. "'No, Lady Alice,' he answered suavely. 'But, you see, you are not a chicken.'"

CHAPTER IX

A PARAGRAPH IN THE "WESTMINSTER GAZETTE"

"ALGERNON has a poem in this month's *Nineteenth Century*," said Watts-Dunton to me one morning. "If he asks you whether you have seen it—by the bye, have you?"

I nodded.

"Ah! I won't ask you just now what you think of it. He has gone for a walk across Putney Common, and may be in any moment. But what I wanted an opportunity of mentioning to you, before you see him, was just this—say all you possibly can to him in praise of it. I have been at him, for ever so long, to write poems with shorter lines. His longer line poems lend themselves to his besetting sin—verbosity, and——"

Just then, Swinburne suddenly—not entered, but exploded into the room like a flung cracker. A firework of that name, tossed in by the hand of a mischievous boy, could not more greatly have disconcerted the plotting pair of us. The joy (to the schoolboy flinger) of the flung cracker is twofold—it comes as a surprise and it takes one with glorious uncertainty. And just as the firework cracks hither and thither—no one knowing where next—so Swinburne exploded crackerwise about the room, now in this corner, now in that, letting off sharp, short, hissing sounds, as of a burning fuse, and repeating: "It is not senility, it is anility!" in a voice that had the viciousness of a whip-crack.

Watts-Dunton, who had now gathered, from the fact that Swinburne held a book in his hand and was waving it menacingly in the air, that all this "to do," this tornado, was mainly "literary," and was a letting off of pent-up steam which had accumulated on

a solitary walk, was more solicitous about his friend's outer garments than about his inner and mental condition. "My dear fellow," he protested, "you are soaked, soaked, and must change instantly."

Swinburne, "all of a glow," partly from the slashing of the rain, the buffeting of the wind, and partly from excitement, shook himself, dogwise, as if to dry his coat.

"I won't change! I'm perfectly dry," he replied mutinously. Again he waved the book in air, again he repeated his shrill chant: "It is not senility, it is anility!"

"What is, my dear boy?" inquired Watts-Dunton cajolingly, as one who humours a spoilt child.

"Palgrave's *Golden Treasury*," replied Swinburne. "I've got the Second Series (just out) here, bought it as I was starting for my walk, and have been dipping into it going along. And what do you think? What do you think?"

"Well, well, nothing very dreadful, I'm

sure," said Watts-Dunton. "You have always thought Palgrave something of a good-hearted old duffer. We all know that it was Tennyson's judgment, Tennyson's choice, which made the First Series of *The Golden Treasury* so admirable and so successful; but dear old Palgrave isn't likely to go very far wrong, and he can't have done anything to offend you or me by quoting our unworthy or inferior work, or by leaving us out, for, if I remember rightly, there are no living poets included."

Swinburne flung wide his arms—palms open, fingers flicking, as if in despair that any one should interpose such talk and such excuse in face of such wrongs as his. He was now almost hoarse, as well as shrill with rage.

"Seventeen jingles by Arthur O'Shaughnessy!" he screamed, hurling the offending volume from him and again exploding, crackerwise, about the room, to the imminent danger of all present (a nervous woman

might, as when frightened by a mouse, have been moved to mount a chair). "Seventeen jigging, polka-like, and wholly pestilent jingles by that miserable mimic and monkey O'Shaughnessy, and not so much as a poem, not so much as a line, by that exquisitely sweet and truest of all our younger poets, the dear friend of all us here, Philip Marston."

At that, even Watts-Dunton's brows gathered ominously, almost menacingly.

For once, and by a curious coincidence, it fell to me to quell the storm. On the way down to The Pines I had bought an early *Westminster Gazette*, and drawing it now from my pocket, I pointed silently to a headline: "Death of Professor F. T. Palgrave."

In an instant the anger and the excitement passed from Swinburne's eyes and face. He was not only silenced, he was as one rebuked, and (he felt) deservedly so.

"I am very, very sorry," he said, with singular and gentle simplicity, "and sorry for what was said just now. I did not know,

and all my memories of him are glad and gracious memories. They are grateful memories, too, for the many kindnesses he did me."

He looked me fully, steadily, challengingly in the face for a few moments, as if half-ashamed to be thus speaking and yet determined not to be shamed out of so speaking. He seemed, too, to be probing, as it were, into my eyes, as if to discover how far I understood or did not understand what was in his mind. Then, in a low and subdued voice, he added: "I think I will go to my room for a little while," and noiselessly slipped away.

CHAPTER X

"ALL MY MEMORIES OF HIM ARE GLAD AND GRACIOUS MEMORIES"

IF in these later chapters I have spoken less reservedly than in a previously published work of the failings and imperfections which the great of the earth share, not equally, but unequally, with smaller folk —for in the great the human side is in excess, as well as that which is "on the side of the angels"—it is with no wish to afford "little minds" an opportunity, as Stevenson somewhere says, "to sneer at their betters." On the contrary, we who are of the small of the earth, should surely respect and revere the great more greatly for the fact that, though the great share with us the infirmities which

keep us small, they have succeeded in attaining greatness, their failings notwithstanding.

Nor do I propose to attribute either Swinburne's infirmities or his achievements (the noble legacy of song he has left us) to the "artistic temperament." That the artistic temperament has bequeathed to us, as is often maintained, countless and precious works of art, I insistently deny. The men and women to whom we owe most in Literature, Music, and Art gave us of their best and noblest, not because of, but in spite of the artistic temperament, which makes generally merely for erratic mediocrity. Swinburne was a man, not of artistic temperament, but of genius. Which of the two writers—Charles Lamb, in speaking of "the sanity of true genius," or Heine, in describing genius as "like the pearl in the oyster, only a splendid disease," is right we will not here inquire. Whichever point of view one takes, it is well to bear in mind, alike of genius or of mediocrity, of gentleman or of hind, the precept:

"Be pitiful, for every one is fighting a hard battle."

"All my memories of him are glad and gracious memories. They are grateful memories, too, for the many kindnesses he did me." So said Algernon Charles Swinburne of Francis Palgrave; and in my own way, and for my own small part, I would ask to be permitted so to say of him. A great poet, he was also a great gentleman, perhaps the knightliest poet figure to pass this way since the Elizabethan days, in which, surely, Swinburne should have been born? Swinburne, in top-hatted Victorian and later times, when poets and men of letters come under an Income Tax scale, and are rated with the surgeon and the notary as members of a "profession"; when the poet sings, not as birds sing, for sheer joy of life, for love's sake, or, it may be, sings for no more than a song's sake, but sings to print his songs in a book to sell,—has always seemed to me as one born out of due time. But Swinburne

(beard and all), cloaked and sworded, and companioned by Sir Walter Raleigh, Sir Philip Sidney, Sir John Suckling, Lovelace and many another Elizabethan poet soldier or poet courtier—for born courtier Swinburne was, as well as born poet—is as real, as natural, almost as familiar a figure as if, so pictured, his portrait was hanging for all to see at Hampton Court or the National Gallery.

One day Swinburne's portrait, not as he might have been, but as he was, may so hang. It is like to be a distant day, for we as a people are in no haste to acknowledge what we owe to the poets. In estimating her "National Debt," her moral, not money obligations, Britannia is apt to leave poets out of the reckoning. She has, in fact, always treated them hardly. James Watt gave us the steam engine; Algernon Charles Swinburne gave us *Atalanta in Calydon*. Each was a gift, though in degree or in use the two gifts could scarcely be farther apart. But of James Watt we did not say: "You

have given us the steam engine. Good! But now you must give us another steam engine. It must be a greater piece of work than the first, or we shall say, 'James Watt is played out.' It must not in any way resemble the first, or we shall say: 'James Watt is merely repeating himself. This steam engine is in effect merely an echo of work already done.'"

No. We took the steam engine from James Watt, the miner's safety lamp from Sir Humphry Davy (the list might be indefinitely extended), and were grateful. It is not so we treat the poet, the author. The other day some one said to me: "I've got a grievance against your friend Jacobs. None of his later books is a patch upon *Many Cargoes*."

"I do not agree," I replied; "but if I did, and had W. W. Jacobs written nothing else but *Many Cargoes*, I, for one, should be grateful for a laughter-making book which I never take up without new delight, a book

which has scores of times made me forget my worries, has taken me out of myself, and has reminded me that this dear, old, much-abused world is still a delightfully droll and amusing place in which to live.

"So far from having a grievance, it seems to me that you should take *Many Cargoes* from Mr. W. W. Jacobs, *The Recessional* from Mr. Kipling, as we took the steam engine from Watt, the safety lamp from Davy, and even if neither author wrote anything so good again, or wrote no other word, you and I have reason to be, and should be, infinitely grateful."

In reading certain criticisms of Swinburne's later work, I am reminded of the popular recitation about the man who listened for the first time to the nightingale—listened far into the night with ravished ear. But in the end the sheer wonder of the novelty passed. The man, being only human, wearied, yawned, and bethought him of bed—yet still the nightingale sang on. That which had once been

a rapture became something of an infliction. While the singer thus transformed the startled and stagnant pools of midnight into jettying fountains of throbbing song (as the moon had transformed the darkened plains into lagoons of lovely light), the man could not compose himself for slumber; until at last, if I remember the recitation rightly, he got out of bed, stole softly downstairs for his gun, and, as the final line tells: "I shot that nightingale."

Of Swinburne's earlier work some critics said that it was the divinest music; of his later that it was very fine, but they had heard it all before, which would be equally true of the nightingale, though the singer remains none the less a nightingale for that. Then at last, if they did not precisely shoot their nightingale with a gun, they did their best, or worst, to kill his poems by their criticisms, and *all because of a change which had come about, not in his work, but in themselves.*

For the marvel of Swinburne was that though, like the nightingale, he sang his noblest songs in what one may call the mating season of man's life, the note of passion was never entirely lost.

Some who are no longer young, some of us, indeed, who are already old, can still take up our Swinburne and dream ourselves back into the days when we and all that seemed loveliest in the world were young together. Those were days when every newly dawning morning had a glory of its own, when down the emerald-misted aisles of woodland glades we looked to see riding a knight and a lady, and when in forest paths we seemed to catch afar the flutter or flash of white robes, as of some ever-fleeing fairy or nymph.

Perhaps it is only upon those who are young in years, or those who, if middle-aged or actually old, still retain some youthfulness of heart, that the spell and the glamour of Swinburne fall. He is to some of us—as he will be to many a man and woman, many a

youth and maiden, a hundred, or perhaps hundreds of years hence—the divinest and most majestic singer of the Sunrise and the Sea, yet, none the less, an immortal youth, a Peter Pan of poetry who never grew old, but remained in love with Life, in love with Love, and in love with Song, to his own life's end.

THE END

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

IN GOOD COMPANY

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SOME OPINIONS

The Nation (New York). Sir W. Robertson Nicoll, writing in *British Weekly*, says: "Mr. Coulson Kernahan's admirable book, *In Good Company*, is enthusiastically praised in that fastidious journal, the New York *Nation*. The reviewer gives high praise to Mr. Kernahan's 'deliberately executed literary portraits, composed and finished with a clear consciousness that portrait painting is a fine art with a technique beyond the reach of the cheerful chatterbox. Mr. Kernahan tells a number of good stories—a capital one of Lord Tennyson—but he *uses* them, subordinates them to a central artistic intention. . . . He understands what has never dawned upon most of our cheerful gossips and our loose amorphous-minded literary radicals—namely, that seven-eighths of the value of an appreciation depends directly upon the value of the appreciator, that the definition and measurement of a talent or a character can be made only by a man with measures and definitions, and finally, that a winsome style in prose comes from a man whose heart is good.' This is high praise and it is well merited."

The Times.—"We have enjoyed Mr. Kernahan's book so much that we find ourselves asking what the reason can be. For the most part snapshot reminiscences of celebrities, though we can no more help reading them than we can help turning the pages of a picture paper, leave us with a slight feeling of depression. The little pictures are so real, so authentic—and yet if Tennyson really said this or did that have we missed so very much by never having known Tennyson? And thus we determine to check our natural instinct of reverence, and come rather to disbelieve in great men. The impression that Mr. Kernahan's book produces is the exact opposite of this. He is a good but by no means a blind hero-worshipper; he makes little use of stories of personalities. . . . But he succeeds very singularly in making us feel that to all these men life was a rich and remarkable affair, and that, after all, is what we want to know about; that is what we cannot altogether get from their books. The average person is chiefly struck by the eccentricities of the great; Mr. Kernahan, on the other hand, bears witness to the fulness, sincerity, and passion with which great men live compared with lesser men. It is our method, indeed, of passing time and spending money that should rightly be called eccentric—not theirs.

"Consider, for instance, what the present of a bunch of flowers meant to Swinburne. . . . This was an important event to him; his next day would begin with a solitary ecstasy over a bunch of flowers. We must change our focus altogether if we want to understand how the day which begins with the contemplation of lilies is lived by the poet. Many incidents must be blurred; others brought out with a sudden and amazing intensity. And this impression of a change in the focus is still with us when Mr. Kernahan writes of Watts-Dunton, although, of course, it is a very different change.

. . . . . .

"The study of Edward Whymper gives us another view of the life which has got itself out of the rut, though in his case this was achieved by no bias of extraordinary genius, unless, as sometimes seems to be the case, to be a 'character' is to be an artist, although you produce no work of art. The account of this masterful, independent, and self-isolated man, who lived for choice at the top of a high house in Southend, with a housekeeper in the basement and the intervening storeys completely unfurnished, so that he might feel himself alone, interests us like one of those portraits of queer people painted to perfection by Borrow. We would draw attention in particular to the delightful scene with the photograph of himself when he had already kept Mr. Kernahan waiting from 8.30 to 12.30 for his supper. . . . But, like all Mr. Kernahan's studies, this is a portrait, and we have no right to spoil it by picking out a

handful of eccentricities ; for he makes us understand that the queer ways of the great are for the most part only an impatient short cut to a life beyond our reach."

Observer.—"It is a long time since there has been published so attractive, so pleasant a volume of sketches as this. Mr. Kernahan's own company is quite as good and probably far more agreeable than that of some of the friends he writes about. His book is quite free from egotism, and yet gives the reader a very clear idea of the author. . . . Let the reader turn to the account of Edward Whymper. *Pace* Mr. Kernahan, Mr. Whymper was a bear, and a rude bear ; yet we are glad Mr. Kernahan put up with him, for, in consequence, 'out of the strong has come forth sweetness.' Mr. Kernahan is equally felicitous in his study of one of the gentlest and noblest of men, Lord Roberts. There the real modesty of the great, the clear attractiveness of the gentleman, is exemplified again and again. The sketch of Swinburne is an invaluable supplement to Mr. Gosse's *Life*, which dismisses the life at The Pines rather too hastily. . . . This is a delightful book, which should make a new circle of readers for Mr. Kernahan's imaginative work."

Daily Chronicle.—"One of the pleasantest books that has come the way of publishing lately is Mr. Coulson Kernahan's *In Good Company*. With much to tell in anecdote and impression of distinguished contemporaries, Mr. Kernahan is here more than merely diverting, for, in accordance with invariable custom, a tone of definite purpose and practical point illumines every page. Especially is this so in the chapter on Lord Roberts, where is told the story of the friendly relations existing for many years between the writer and the fighter in their common zeal for the well-being of our land. Mr. Kernahan's keen advocacy of National Service, through the Territorial Force, and, later, in the volunteering for active service in the war, won Lord Roberts's warmest appreciation, and resulted in an acquaintance mutually advantageous. To this very interesting piece of reminiscence Mr. Kernahan prefixes his poem, 'Ordered Out,' one of the best tributes, certainly, paid in verse to the memory of a great soldier.

"A touching and lifelike sketch follows of an intimate friend. 'One day,' says Mr. Kernahan, 'I hope to show Stephen Phillips as he really was ;' and certainly no man is better fitted to undertake a task so delicate. Here, in a chapter all too brief, we are given a sympathetic glimpse of the scene and the effect produced 'When Stephen Phillips Read.' The actual thing must have been a great experience indeed.

"Excellent reading on the life (now established in romantic

tradition) at The Pines, Putney, is afforded in a chapter on Swinburne, whom Mr. Kernahan knew well, and on Watts-Dunton, whom, perhaps, he knew even better. The author of *Aylwin* is viewed amusingly as the 'Ogre of the *Athenæum*' and as the prince of literary amateurs, as well as the upright downright 'good fellow' he was to those who knew him best. Sidelights, such as these, from a book-loving household, are excellent material in the hand of one who displays them so well.

"Other figures in the Good Company include Wilde, Edward Whymper, the veteran mountaineer, S. J. Stone, the City rector, who wrote the famous hymn, 'The Church's One Foundation,' and several incidentally. First and last is Mr. Kernahan himself, who has produced a fascinating book of personal recollections in delightful English prose. His wider remembrances, already 'threatened,' ought to follow soon."

The *Outlook* (the Book of the Week).—"Delightfully attractive. . . . We end as we began, in gratitude for a feast of generosity, which warms the air, and brings back the almost forgotten promise of springtide and the sun."

S0-DRH-689